

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony of Sean Cosgrove

California Wilderness Coalition
Citizens for Better Forestry
Coast Range Association
Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund
Gifford Pinchot Task Force
Headwaters
Klamath Forest Alliance
LightHawk
National Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation
Northcoast Environmental Center
Northwest Ecosystem Alliance
Oregon Natural Resources Council
Pacific Rivers Council
Pilchuck Audubon Society
Portland Audubon Society
Siskiyou Project
The Wilderness Society
Umpqua Watersheds
Western Ancient Forest Campaign
Western Environmental Law Center

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Testimony of Sean Cosgrove, Legislative Coordinator for the
Forest Water Alliance, on "The Status and Impacts of the
Northern Spotted-Owl On National Forests"

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. The coalition that I represent consists of 21 national and grassroots organizations from western Washington, Oregon and northwestern California. These groups have a long history of involvement in management of Northwest National Forests and, together, represent over 100,000 citizens from the region.

For decades in the Pacific Northwest, the federal government has been in the business of selling off ancient forests from our public lands. Throughout the 1980s, the Forest Service allowed ancient forests to be logged at a phenomenal rate. By 1987, the timber industry was logging an estimated 170 acres of old growth -- the

equivalent of 129 football fields -- each day. The draft Forest Management Plans at that time called for the continued liquidation of old growth forests.

By the early 1990s much of our National Forests in western Washington, Oregon and northern California were a tattered maze of clear-cuts and logging roads. Ancient forest stands that previously covered the region have been left in scattered remnant stands. The practice of clear-cutting old growth forests has not only harmed forest-dwelling species such as the Northern spotted owl, but has also seriously damaged salmon streams and degraded watersheds that provide drinking water to many people in the Northwest.

Several forest species and salmon runs were on the brink of extinction. Continued illegal logging of ancient forest eventually led a U.S. federal court to stop old growth logging until a plan was devised to protect the Northwest's ancient forests and salmon streams for the future. This injunction and the need to provide better, scientific management led to the creation of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The Northwest Forest Plan was heralded by the Clinton Administration as the plan that would protect and recover ancient forests, salmon populations and numerous other forestdwelling species. However, since this plan was put into effect in May of 1994 it has fallen short.

Four years after President Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan went into effect, Forest Service personnel are exploiting loopholes in the plan to clear-cut in streamside reserves, log on steep, landslide prone slopes, log in ancient forest reserves, log in unprotected wilderness and log in watersheds that provide communities with drinking water

The ForestWater Alliance compiled a report that provides a snapshot of Northwest National Forest management in 1997. Compiling information from federal fiscal year 1997 timber sales in the 17 National Forests and 6 Bureau of Land Management Districts in Washington, Oregon and California that are managed under the Northwest Forest Plan we found that the Forest Service logged over 7,000 acres of ancient forest, over 5,500 acres of forest in streamside reserves and over 7,800 acres of forest in ancient forest reserves. To compound the problem, more timber sales were sold in municipal watersheds and unprotected wilderness.

Threats to Ancient Forests

President Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan established ancient forest reserves on Northwest National Forests in an attempt to protect old growth forests. Many citizens thought the Northwest Forest Plan was doing just that -- protecting ancient forests for future generations of Americans to enjoy. Unfortunately, the plan still allows for 150 to 500 year old stands of forest to be clear-cut.

In 1997, one such timber sale was the Skeeter Timber Sale on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. This sale is located in the headwaters of the Lewis River between Mt. Adams Wilderness and the Mt. St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, and adjacent to the Steamboat Mountain Research Area. The trees in this timber sale are up to 400 years old. This area contains habitat for numerous threatened, endangered, and sensitive species including bald eagle, peregrine falcon, gray wolf and others. The Lewis River supports one of the last remaining populations of bull trout on the forest. The Skeeter Timber Sale will log nearly 200 acres of ancient forest. By employing the most intensive logging techniques available, exceeding maximum clear-cut size requirements, and logging through wetlands, the Skeeter Timber Sale will increase flooding and erosion problems in the Lewis River.

Despite recognition that past logging and road building activities have fragmented the forest ecosystem and significantly degraded water quality, the Forest Service has sold nine timber sales in the Lewis River watershed since the adoption of the Northwest Forest Plan.

Threats to Northwest Salmon

Salmon are part of our national heritage and an important symbol of Northwest culture. Preventing salmon extinction means protecting the forest streams where these fish feed and lay their eggs. Logging and road construction can fill the streams with silt and eroded material that smother fish eggs and literally choke salmon.

The Northwest Forest Plan has failed to protect threatened and endangered salmon populations in several ways. First, although the plan initially provides for a minimum buffer size for all streams, this minimum may be reduced even further after watershed analysis. Second, although the plan calls for protection of steep and unstable soils as additional reserves, often these areas are not mapped and protected during the planning of timber sales. Lastly, although the plan identifies key salmon watersheds, logging and roadbuilding are allowed inside these areas.

The effect is continued degradation of salmon habitat, declining salmon populations and an impact on tens of thousands of fishing jobs.

Threats to Clean Drinking Water

Our federal forests provide many people with clean, clear drinking water. In Oregon alone, more than half of the population gets its drinking water from streams originating in federal forests. Logging and road construction in community and municipal drinking watersheds add erosion and silt to the drinking water. During winter storms the runoff from roads and clearcuts can turn clear streams into muddy torrents. In some instances this can place the drinking water supplies for whole communities in jeopardy.

In 1996, the North Santiam River was filled with silt and mud when heavy rains hit a landscape degraded by clearcuts and logging roads, causing many major landslides. Residents and businesses were forced to dramatically curtail water use and buy water from a neighboring community when muddy water threatened to destroy Salem's filtration system.

Many landslides have occurred since 1996, and many slides continue to bleed silt into Salem's drinking water supply. Despite these circumstances, four 1997 timber sales will log an additional 791 acres in the same watershed. Salem Mayor Mike Swaim, past Mayor Roger Gertenrich and several Salem city council members have sought to protect the watershed from federal logging plans, pending results of a Government Accounting Office investigation. Mayor Swaim comments, *'Every time they jog off another timber sale in Salem's municipal watershed, I worry about our drinking water. What you see in a clear-cut is what you get in your drinking glass - dirt.'* The government's response: double logging in the North Santiam watershed in 1998.

Choices For Our Future

The Northwest Forest Plan was an ambitious undertaking and it has made some improvements to federal forest management in the Pacific Northwest. However, the plan still allows for the destruction of ancient forest, the degradation of salmon streams and the development of unprotected wilderness. The Northwest

Forest Plan allows logging and road construction in communities' drinking water supplies. The Northwest Forest Plan is full of loopholes that allow logging in ancient forest and streamside reserves. Some loopholes even allow for clearcutting straight across streams. In some areas, the last bits of ancient forest are being liquidated. Is this what Northwesters thought they were getting when the forest plan was devised?

Four years after the adoption of the Northwest Forest Plan it is clear that residents of the Northwest want better forest protection. A recent poll conducted by the ForestWater Alliance shows that 72% of residents across the region want to see more federal lands designated as Wildemess. The time has come to honestly assess the problems with the Northwest Forest Plan and work together for better forest protection on our public forests.

We have a choice to make about the fate of our Northwest forests. What we leave for future generations depends on the decisions that we make today. We can continue with a plan that further degrades our forests and watersheds or we can seek out new solutions for the permanent protection of our ancient forests, salmon streams, unprotected wilderness areas and drinking water supplies. The choice is ours. The time to act is now.

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